

It's a Girl's Thing

Chiara Manfrinato

What do Bridget Jones and Yves Saint Laurent have in common after all?

We are generally inclined to split translators into three major categories: technical translators, copy translators and literary translators.

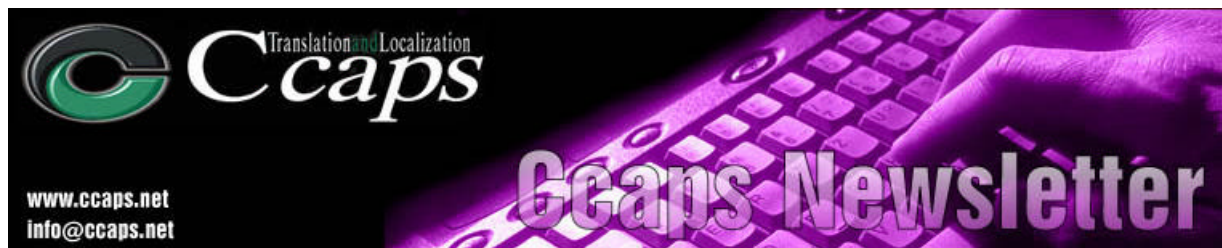
Technical translators are expected to have a deep knowledge of purely technical processes and terminology. Copy translators are expected to be able to adapt an advertising message from one language and culture into another. Literary translators are expected to rewrite creative works in a different language with a taste for details and nuances, remaining faithful to the original author's choices.

Those who translate for the fashion industry are expected to be like Cerberus, the three-headed creature of Greek mythology. They must be familiar with the fashion industry processes and terminology, which represent the technical aspect. They must be able to adapt an essentially advertising message that seeks to attract people and sell goods. They must also be able to use their literary writing skills to understand and recreate an atmosphere, effectively reproducing the original language style and undertones. The last mentioned aspect, which is often neglected by those who work in the fashion industry, is the most important in my opinion. For this reason, it will be the focus of my article.

Think of a relatively new literary genre that has been extremely successful all over the world during recent years: the so-called "chick lit" genre (for more information, please visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chick_lit). Chick lit and the fashion industry share a common communication strategy, making them quite similar.



If you enjoyed Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, why not try other chick lit authors? Check them out at <http://www.chicklit.co.uk>



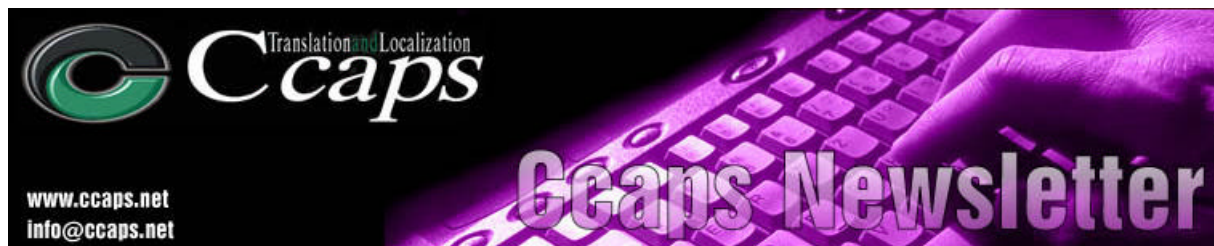
In fact, both chick-lit and fashion sell dreams. When facing a perfect world, full of beautiful people and fabulous clothes, buyers and readers want to think that they can also be part of this universe. They should not perceive it as an elite world, but rather as an open and accessible one. It is a communication strategy based on identification, which means that regular old people admire what and whom they see (and read) and imagine that they can be that way too. In other words, glamour is within reach.

The fashion industry has been obliged, in a certain sense, to revise its communication strategy to hit the target. After all, its message has been committed to images for a very long time. More recently, however, the industry has made enhanced use of words, which have gained momentum through the rediscovery of fashion literature.



Sex and the City, a successful HBO series, was based on Candice Bushnell's book of the same name and is perhaps the best combination of the worlds of fashion and chick lit.

The fashion industry has its own words. These are the words of the textile industry, of course, but they are also those of marketing and, above all, they are the words of chick-lit. Anyone can create a rich and useful fashion glossary by reading Sophie Kinsella's novels, for instance, and also extract something beyond terminology, the "summa" of the fashion system itself.



Chick-lit authors and fashion editors use the same language (and clichés), which is based on popular language. Their vocabulary is full of slang and common use expressions that have often not yet entered official dictionaries, even the most updated. But beyond lexicon, the basic element shared by chick-lit and fashion language is the style, which must be flirty, enjoyable, humorous, amusing, frivolous and light. It is a language that laymen understand and use in their daily lives.

Those who translate for the fashion industry must be fully aware of these complexities. They have to be familiar with fashion designers' unique styles and collections. They must know what the famous brand endorsers represent in both the source and target cultures (as well as the related gossip). They must be curious, attentive and trend catchers, too. Above all, fashion translators must know and understand pop culture and consider it when translating. That is because those who translate for the fashion industry have to be able to translate dreams.

Chiara Manfrinato, a native-speaker of Italian, works as a freelance translator, having completed projects for major Italian fashion designers through her work for translation agencies. Chiara is both a fashionholic and a chicklitaholic.